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Doctor DEMINO

Story and Photos by Ken Perrotte

SOLDIERS seated on the bleachers at Virginia's Fort A.P. Hill were understandably a bit nervous as they watched John Fasulo demonstrate the capabilities and dangers of explosives.

Fasulo, a member of the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command's Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate at Fort Belvoir, Va., had just shown them a quick way to "dry" a piece of laundry. A quick flick of a clacker and the material, hanging from a clothesline made of explosive detonation cord, disintegrated into confetti.

From a long table covered with land mines, Fasulo alternately reached for various makes and models and

explained the military benefits and drawbacks of each. During the Gulf War, the Iraqis used Italian land mines, but failed to pull a pin that would have armed the mines, he said.

Another Italian mine, no larger than a breakfast muffin, "doesn't kill its



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victim. It just wounds him severely enough to require several comrades to evacuate him," Fasulo explained. To make his point, he detonated the mine inches below a combat boot filled with foam. The explosion ripped off the front of the boot, but only shredded other parts of it.

With each demonstration, Fasulo drove home a critical point. And each had a single purpose: to keep U.S. and allied soldiers alive.

After Fasulo retrieved an ammunition can twisted by the force of a single blasting cap, he explained that simply rubbing the cap, or placing it in a pocket, can generate enough heat and friction to cause it to explode.

At one point, the students were led into steel bunkers to watch an antitank mine detonate. The blast created an eight-foot-wide crater that sent mud

Ken Perrotte is the public affairs officer at Fort A.P. Hill, Va.

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and sand hurtling into the air. Safe in the bunkers, the students heard the sounds of chunks of earth smacking into the trees above and behind them.

After Fasulo gave the "all clear," they accompanied him to the hole and stared in awe at the smoldering dirt.

"This mine will stop any tank in the world," said Fasulo, who teaches a land-mine segment to units that come to Fort A.P. Hill for training.

Hank Hanrahan, Fort A.P. Hill's director of Plans, Training, Mobilization and Security, said Fasulo's reputation as a demolitions expert "is almost mythical in nature, particularly in the Marine Corps. If you want something blown up, John is the man to see. When it comes to explosives and mine warfare, either offensive or defensive, he is 'The Man.'"

Fasulo enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1950 and reached the rank of master sergeant before being commissioned in

1966. His expertise has always been in demolitions and mine clearing. And he took that expertise to Vietnam in 1968.

"I did get hit with a piece of shrapnel from a mine. But it didn't knock me out of commission. There were so many soldiers who got hit much worse than I did," Fasulo reflected.

He retired as a major in 1977, and became a civil servant in 1981, working with the Engineer School at Fort Belvoir before moving to A.P. Hill to manage the demolition test range in 1986.

His regular day job as an engineering technician, conducting research and tests related to demining operations, pays dividends for the United States and other nations, Fasulo said.

The A.P. Hill test site is often the first place prototype humanitarian demining equipment is tested after being developed from commercial



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farming and forestry machinery.

In many Third World countries, minefields created decades ago are now covered with jungle or forests. The land can't be used as long as the mines are present, preventing development and endangering residents. The tools Fasulo tests are often part of the solution to reclaiming mine fields.

Fasulo said there's much remaining to be done with land mines. "I feel an obligation to pass on what the Army and Marine Corps taught me." □



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